CITY OF VANCOUVER

Archives Newsletter

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THE FRIENDS

Join the Friends and get involved in helping the City of Vancouver Archives preserve Vancouver's documentary heritage. For information about the Friends' activities, see the back cover.

Thanks to all the Archives staff and students who contributed to this issue:

Sue Bigelow, Christine Gergich, Nadine Hafner, Rosaleen Hill, Megan Schlase, and Chak Yung.

vancouver.ca/archives

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING CITY ARCHIVIST

Welcome to the Spring 2007 issue of the City of Vancouver Archives Newsletter. As usual, you'll find it full of information about the Archives' recent activities and the folks who keep things ticking along out front and behind the scenes at CVA. You'll also notice that the Newsletter has a brand new look and feel, thanks to the kind assistance of our colleagues in the City's Corporate Communications Division. We hope you find it as new and fresh as we do.

This issue offers a diverse mix of profiles and project reports, along with some new features aimed at raising the Archives' public profile and encouraging donations. Much of what we have focused on over the past few months, and indeed, one of our major priorities for 2007, is just that—making sure people know who we are, what we do and what we have. Our plans are ambitious, particularly as we look ahead to 2008—the 75th anniversary of the Archives' founding.

If anything you read in the Newsletter piques your interest, and you'd like to learn more about the exciting things underway at the Archives these days (or even get involved as a volunteer!), don't hesitate to contact me. We're looking forward to working with all our friends and colleagues during what is shaping up to be a very exciting time here at CVA.

In order to learn more about the holdings in the Archives, we invite you to drop by for a visit or check out our website.

Suggestions, comments or questions you may have about our Newsletter or website are always welcome.

Heather Gordon,
Acting City Archivist

FEATURED FONDS

Fonds is an archival term that means the whole of the documents, regardless of form or medium, created and accumulated by a person, family, organization, or other corporate body in the course of that creator's activities or functions. Archives work by acquiring fonds, preserving them, and organizing them for use and access. Each issue of the newsletter focuses on a fonds recently made available.

KUO KONG SILK COMPANY FONDS

By Chak Yung

When talking about records from the Chinese community in the holdings of the Archives, our researchers may point to the Sam Kee Company fonds or the Yip Sang family fonds since they are important records which document Chinatown's history.

However, the first group of Chinese records acquired by the Archives was the Kuo Kong Silk Company (國光髮絲公司) fonds. Kuo Kong Silk Company was a retail shop located in Chinatown with a history of over 70 years of operation. The records were donated by Mrs. S. Jackman,

1936 Kuo Kong Silk Company catalogue

1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6J 3J9 *tel* 604.736.8561 *fax* 604.736.0626

proprietor of the company, in 1975. Records of the Kuo Kong Silk Company consist of the firm's correspondence, financial records and statements, personal correspondence, silk samples and customer catalogues.

The Kuo Kong Silk Company was founded by Mr. G. Jackman (朱直民) and Mr. Mah Young (馬宗揚) in 1922 and first appeared in the Vancouver City directory in 1925. The company was originally located at 47 East Pender Street and was moved to 27 East Pender Street in 1927. In 1937, the company expanded its business by establishing two subsidiary operations, International Clothing (located at 44 East Hastings Street) as another sales arm, and National Dry Goods Manufacturing (located at Market Alley) as an additional manufacturing outlet. Besides selling silk products imported from China, the company manufactured fine silk dress shirts, sheets, pillowcases, work shirts, restaurant uniforms, and overalls. These goods, plus a wide range of men's and women's apparel, were sold along with Chinese curio items. The company continued to operate until 1987.

In the catalogues, the company stated clearly that a special bonus would be offered to any customer who could refer a new "westerner" customer to the company.

Although the Kuo Kong Silk Company was based in Vancouver, its business activities were by no means limited to the city. By 1930, a mail order system was in operation to sell goods across the country. This progressive approach is evident in the company's records. In order to keep track of the customers and promote the company products, Kuo Kong Silk Company kept very detailed clients' records and Kuo Kong was one of the very few companies in Chinatown that published its own catalogues. Their illustrated catalogues listed the major products and prices. Besides selling their goods nationwide, Kuo Kong also actively expanded their business from the Chinese community to mainstream society. They even issued English versions of their catalogues. In the catalogues, the company stated clearly that a special bonus would be offered to any customer who could refer a new "westerner" customer to the company. With a good sales strategy, Kuo Kong set a successful example for small businesses in Vancouver. Even during the harsh years between 1940 and 1945, according to the company's balance sheets Kuo Kong's average yearly gross sales income was about $70,000 (not bad even for today).

L352—Exceedingly

HANDSOME SATIN KIMONAS

Made of high grade Satin, lined with Silk, hand embroidered in Dragons or Floral designs at back and front. Full length. Colors: Black, Pink, and Blue.
Price, each **$12.50**

Detail from 1940 catalogue (English version)
Kuo Kong Silk Company Fonds, Add.MSS.369

Kuo Kong Silk Company records not only supplement the Archives holdings of ethnic and business records but also document a successful story of a Chinese business operation in the last century.

There are many interesting insights to be gained from Kuo Kong's records. By reading the company's 1940 catalogues, we learn that a silk dress shirt was $5.50, a pair of dress pants was $3.75, and a J.A. Henckels 12.5" cutting knife was only $4.25. Moreover, Kuo Kong offered a seven-day return or exchange satisfaction guarantee to their customers. Kuo Kong's employee records show that in the 1940s a store manager earned $38.46 per week, a clerk earned $15 per week and the standard working hours were 44 per week. In a 1945 staff record, it is startling to discover that over half of the company's 12 employees were not Chinese.

Kuo Kong Silk Company records not only supplement the Archives holdings of ethnic and business records but also document a successful story of a Chinese business operation in the last century.

ARCHIVES' JUBILEE IN 2008

The City of Vancouver Archives will be 75 years old in 2008. Major J. S. Matthews was appointed by City Council to the position of City Archivist on June 12, 1933. We plan to celebrate next year with special projects and events to inform more people about the Archives, its history and holdings.

We are looking for interested and energetic volunteers to serve on a Jubilee Committee which will oversee the year's activities and plan one focus event. We have already started working on some ideas, but we need help to make it a special year.

NEW ACQUISITIONS: ELM TREE MAP

In September 2006, we acquired a map of Point Grey Municipality from 1928 which had been annotated in 1938. It had been used by the Forest Insect and Disease Survey, part of the Canadian Forest Service. The map was annotated in red to show the location of American Elm trees. Blue annotations show the streets with the heaviest infestations, which were sprayed in 1938. Another annotation states that all of the elms in Shaughnessy Heights were sprayed. It does not mention what type of infestation was being eradicated. Accession # 2006-061.

VANCOUVER BICYCLE CLUB PHOTOGRAPH

This photograph shows members of the Vancouver Bicycle Club in 1914. It looks as though the photograph has been water-damaged and also torn, but it is still possible to make out the faces of the cyclists. Accession # 2006-088.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE PROJECTS

Students continue to practice their skills in the Archives during the school year. Below are two projects from early 2007.

TIME CAPSULE AND VERC DESCRIPTION PROJECT

Christine Gergich, who worked for us last summer as a co-op student through the UBC School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, was back early in 2007 to do a professional experience project involving two different groups of records.

She has arranged and described the Vancouver Electoral Reform Commission records. These proved to be a challenge to make accessible, as they included digital records in the form of e-mail, web pages and digital video tapes.

She has also made the Spencer Time Capsule, Add MSS 1495, available and stored the records in acid-free archival containers. The description of this collection is now searchable in the database on our website.

PHOTO: CHAE YUNG

Christine Gergich

PHOTO: SUE BIGELOW

Greg Smith

LIBRARY CATALOGUING PROJECT

Although the focus of our work is to preserve and make available original records, the Archives keeps a 6,000-volume library of published materials as a convenience to researchers. The volumes are searchable only through a card catalogue. In 2006, the Archives worked with two student interns from the Langara College Library and Information Technology Program, Hank Einarson and Deborah Patrick, to create a database for cataloguing these library holdings, and to start entering data.

Greg Smith, a second-year Master of Library and Information Studies student at UBC, is completing a professional experience project towards his degree. He is populating the library database with accurate and consistent catalogue descriptions, and expects to complete about 600 entries by the end of his 120-hour project.

Our goal is to enter all of our library titles into this database so that they can be searched reliably, easily and online. The Archives is actively seeking more students or volunteers to complete this work.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

Nadine Hafner has been volunteering since the fall of 2006 after completing a professional experience practicum in the conservation lab at the City of Vancouver Archives. The practicum, which was part of her studies at UBC where she is in her final semester of the Master of Archival Studies program, was spent working on the Archives' motion picture films.

Nadine's work involved appraising and assessing the condition of films, writing condition reports, cleaning and making minor repairs when necessary, preparing the films for copying and creating standardized descriptions for the database to facilitate access to these materials. She found this work to be very interesting and decided to continue with it and volunteer her time despite a busy schedule at school and work where she is an assistant archivist at the Museum of Anthropology.

Working with the motion picture films has been a great opportunity for Nadine to pursue her interests in visual media, preservation and history. Over the years she has pursued these interests in a variety of ways both here in Canada, as well as internationally. She has an undergraduate degree in archaeology from the University of British Columbia and has worked on several archaeological excavations in B.C., as well as in Greece.

Nadine has also spent time working to preserve the environment. Her involvement with non-profit environmental organizations has taken her from B.C. to Grenada and to Mexico where she focused on environmental education and endangered sea turtle projects. This educational work then led her to a teaching position in Mexico where she was a grade three teacher and later to South America where she taught grade five in Ecuador for two years. Throughout all these experiences Nadine's interest in visual media was fueled and expressed through photography, both professionally and artistically. This led her to spend time exploring photography as an art form through hand-made black and white art photographic darkroom processes.

She has a Professional Photography Diploma from the Western Academy of Photography and her work has been shown in a solo exhibit at the Pandora Art Studio and Gallery in Victoria, as well as other venues both here in Canada and the United States. Combining all of her interests has led her to a career in archives where she hopes to concentrate her efforts on visual media and particularly photography and film.

PHOTO: CHAK TUNG

Nadine Hafner works with motion picture films in the conservation lab.

PHOTO: MEGAN SCHLAKE

Sean Kheraj at the Archives

USERS OF THE ARCHIVES

Sean Kheraj, PhD candidate at York University, has been a regular researcher here at the City of Vancouver Archives since 2005, when he began the research for his PhD dissertation on the environmental history of Stanley Park.

Originally from Kingston, Ontario, Sean grew up and attended both elementary and secondary school in Burnaby. He completed an Honours BA in History at the University of British Columbia in 2002, and an MA in History at York University in Toronto, in 2003.

Besides the City of Vancouver Archives, Sean's research has drawn on the holdings at the BC Provincial Archives in Victoria, Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, and the Special Collections Division at UBC Library.

Sean's dissertation will explore the changing relationship between humans and the rest of nature in Stanley Park over time, from its very early beginnings until the present. He has consulted a wide variety of materials in the Archives holdings, the most fruitful being Park Board minutes, correspondence, and annual reports, as well as maps, architectural drawings, and photographs. Getting very near to completion, his dissertation will be defended at York in Toronto at the end of May.

AUDIOTAPE EVALUATION AND PRESERVATION

By Rosaleen Hill

Machine-readable records pose some of the greatest preservation challenges in archives. The Archives has approximately 600 audio recordings in a variety of formats including reel-to-reel, cassette and LP records. One of the first steps in the preservation of audio recordings is to undertake a condition survey of all audio formats.

PHOTO: TIM KEENAN TOUCH

Audio Tape at high risk

The Archives is one of five sites taking part in the beta testing of FACET (Field Audio Collection Evaluation Tool), a new audio condition-reporting software created at Indiana University. Although FACET was developed to be used for large collections of oral history recordings, the Archives has been using it successfully to record the physical condition of individual tapes and discs.

We have not listened to the recordings as part of this procedure; it might not be possible to play severely deteriorated tapes more than once or twice, and we need to save them the stress of unnecessary playback. We examine the tape's condition, quality of wind, housing, and storage history to assess its level of deterioration.

FACET reporting results in a numerical ranking for each audio tape according to its level of deterioration and the risk level of the specific audio format. A high numerical ranking equates to a more deteriorated audio recording and identifies recordings that should be given a high migration priority. Our worst offender to date, with a ranking of 5.2, is a Kodak Durol cellulose triacetate based reel-to-reel tape. The Durol tape suffers from a chemically unstable plastic base, flange pack, spoking and other tape wind problems, all of which result in a very short life expectancy for this tape. Once the FACET condition survey has been completed, we will be able to make strategic preservation decisions regarding which audio recordings will first be migrated to a digital format.

The Archives is one of five sites taking part in the beta testing of FACET, a new audio condition-reporting software created at Indiana University.

The Archives will be setting up its new audiotape digitization work station early this year. The workstation will use professional analogue playback equipment—a Studer A807 for reel-to-reel tapes and a Nakamichi Dragon for cassette tapes—and a high-quality analogue/digital converter. Once the workstation has been set up, it will be possible to begin the migration of audio tapes to a preservation-quality digital format.

We will be following international standards for the digitization of archival audio, ensuring that the playback machines will extract as much of the audio information as possible with very little distortion. The master files will be stored in a managed digital environment. Access files will be created to allow researchers to hear the oral histories, meetings, and music for the first time in many years.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

In 2006, we had our holdings appraised and a detailed risk assessment done of our facility. The findings of the Risk Assessment and Monetary Appraisal project will be added to those of other formal and informal operational reviews of the Records and Archives Division, and set the stage for one of our major projects of 2007—the development of a formal strategic plan for the Records and Archives division and the City's integrated records management and archives program. That plan will provide a longer-term view of the direction and needs of the division, and generate a development plan that will also guide short- and medium-term decisions.

ARMA VANCOUVER TOURS THE ARCHIVES

On January 31st of this year, the Vancouver chapter of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) visited the Archives for an after-hours tour. As records managers, most of the members routinely deal with records that are actively in use by their organizations.

They had never seen what happens to records which are at the end of their lifecycle but are retained for public use. They were most interested in the access we provide for the public, and the preservation actions we take to ensure that the records last as long as possible.

If your group would like a special tour, please contact the Archives.

ELECTRONIC NEWS AND EVENTS

The Archives will be starting an e-mail-based newsletter to deliver information on new records that have become available, Archives' events and activities, and other news to those interested in Vancouver's history.

We expect it to begin later this year, and to be distributed occasionally.

If you are interested in being on the mailing list, please contact the Archives with your name and e-mail address. This information will not be sold, traded or used for any other purpose.

THE SECOND CITY ARCHIVIST: ROBERT DOUGLAS WATT

By Megan Schlase

Rob Watt served as Vancouver's second City Archivist from May 1, 1971, until September 30, 1972.

Born in Picton, Ontario in 1945, he received his Bachelor of Arts in 1967 and his Master of Arts in 1968, both from Carleton University in Ottawa. Before coming to Vancouver, he worked briefly as an Archivist with the National Archives of Canada, (then called the Public Archives of Canada) from 1969 to 1970.

During his 16-month tenure with the City of Vancouver Archives, much of Watt's time and attention was devoted towards preparations for the move of the Archives' holdings from their previous location in the old public library building to the new Major Matthews Building, our current home.

He met numerous times with the architects of McCarter, Nairne, and Partners, the firm charged with the design of the new facilities, and consulted with many of the leading minds of the day in the archival community across Canada at conferences and meetings in Ottawa, Toronto, and locally, as well as via voluminous written correspondence.

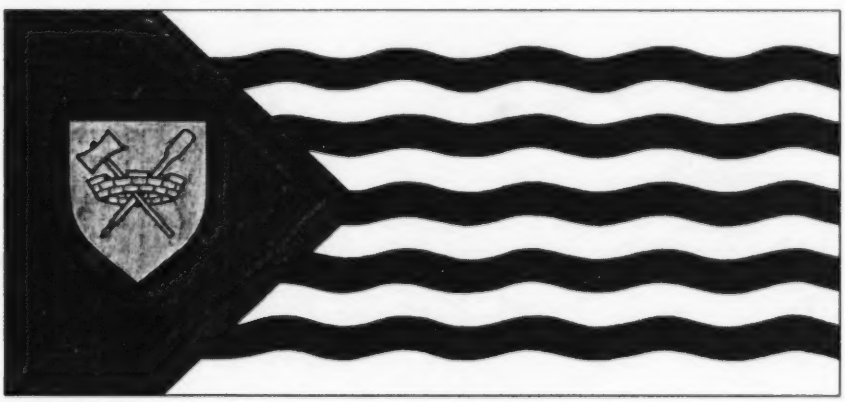
During this time of exciting new developments for the Archives, Watt also managed to oversee uninterrupted reference services to researchers, answering many enquiries from the public personally. He continued to enhance the Archives holdings, meeting with donors and facilitating transfers of items from City departments. He engaged in a variety of community outreach activities, accepted many invitations to address local organizations, spoke to elementary school students, and gave the keynote speech at a local high school graduation.

Originally anticipating the opening of the new building in the spring of 1972, Watt resigned his position as City Archivist at the end of September, three months before it officially opened on December 29, 1972. Since the next City Archivist would not be on the job until January, the official opening ceremonies were presided over by City Clerk of the day, Ronald Thompson.

In 1973, Robert Watt was appointed Curator of History at the Vancouver Centennial Museum (now the Vancouver Museum), became Chief Curator in 1977, and was Director from 1980 to 1988.

Long a Fellow of the Heraldry Society of Canada, it is to Robert Watt that we owe recognition for the design of the City of Vancouver's official flag, approved by Council May 17, 1983, and officially unveiled at City Hall, May 31, that same year.

In 1988, Watt was appointed the Chief Herald of Canada, a position he retains to the present.



Drawing of Vancouver's flag by Bill Turelli. City Council and Office of the City Clerk fonds, series 61.

SPENCER'S TIME CAPSULE RETURNS

The missing time capsule that was put into Spencer's department store in 1936 has been found and returned to Vancouver, and is now safely housed in the Archives.

David Spencer's department store was an important Vancouver retail institution and a rival to Woodward's. The business started in Victoria in 1873, and in 1907 it opened its first Vancouver store. In 1926, their flagship store in the 500-block of West Hastings Street, a beautiful art deco building, was opened. It was nine storeys in total, with five storeys below ground level and 320,000 square feet of retail space. The store was well known for its toyland, its annual toy parades, and having chairs by the elevators.

In 1936, the time capsule was organized by the store as a way to celebrate Vancouver's Golden Jubilee. They invited the public to contribute and put it all in a cedar chest in a storeroom with a sign reading:

"This chest of B.C. cedar is to be packed with mementos of Vancouver's Golden Jubilee Year and messages to those who unlock it on the occasion of Vancouver's Centennial Celebrations in 1986 fifty years hence. What will Vancouver citizens of 1986 want to know about us and our lives of today?"

The chest didn't stay locked for long. In 1939, newspapers celebrating the visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth were added, and then it was re-sealed.

In 1951, Pearson McAllister opened the chest and looked through the contents. He was kind enough to leave a note inside confessing to this, and explaining that he couldn't wait because he feared he'd be dead by 1986.

In 1972, Eaton's, who had purchased Spencer's entire chain of stores in 1948, opened their Pacific Centre store and closed Spencer's Vancouver store. They cleared out everything. The chest and its contents were separated, and we assume auctioned separately at Maynard's. The contents were purchased by Jim Breckenridge, a history teacher from Ontario who happened to be in town on a visit. He didn't really want it for himself, but thought it was so important that it should be preserved by someone.

This photo of the dinette in Spencer's store was in the time capsule. Add.MSS.1495

He had no way to get the materials back to his home, so he left them with a friend in Surrey for a couple of years. The friend eventually drove the boxes to Ontario.

In 1986, the year the time capsule was originally supposed to be opened, Jim Breckenridge contacted the Vancouver Museum and offered them the contents. Since everything was so far away, it appears the Museum showed interest but was unable to follow up, and the materials stayed in Mr. Breckenridge's basement.

Early in December 2006, Mr. Breckenridge drove out to Vancouver to visit his son and brought the time capsule with him. He gave it to the Vancouver Historical Society, and they donated it to the Archives so that it may be preserved and made available.

The collection contains many letters to the future from both children and adults. One of the letters was addressed to the future Mayor of Vancouver and included a David Spencer merchandise coupon, expressing the hope that in 1986 the then-Mayor would not be issuing relief scrip. There is the text of a speech by Pastor Dr. E.D. McLaren, predicting that "In the future, Vancouver will be the gateway, not only of Canada but of the Empire". There are many programs and photographs of special events that were part of the Jubilee celebrations.

There was also a list compiled by W.D. Birdis, who was secretary to David Oppenheimer, the second mayor. It gives the name of everyone who was at Granville Townsite in 1882, organized by profession. It tells us who was the blacksmith, shoemaker, customs collector, wine and spirit merchant, and all the names of the loggers over at the Point Grey logging camp. It even lists the societies which were in existence in 1882, of which there were two: the Ancient Order of the United Workmen, a fraternal society which provided death benefits to its working members; and the Hastings Literary Institute, which was the first library on Burrard Inlet. In January, we held a special event to thank the Vancouver Historical Society for their work in returning the collection to Vancouver. Members had a private showing of the capsule's contents, and saw some recently-digitized films of the Spencer's Toy Parade.

The time capsule collection has been described to Canadian archival standards in our database, and is now available for research as Add. MSS 1495. We plan to scan some of the contents and present them on our website very soon.

Historical Society members enjoy discovering the time capsule.

Friends of the Vancouver City Archives

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE VANCOUVER CITY ARCHIVES

You are invited to become a member of the Friends of the Vancouver City Archives. Annual membership fees are $20 per individual or $30 per family. Donations (over the regular membership fee) are also welcome. The society has charitable status so is able to issue tax receipts. Benefits to members include occasional lectures, special events, the City of Vancouver Archives Newsletter, and "behind-the-scenes" tours. It is expected that there will be two or three meetings a year.

Membership forms are available by calling the City of Vancouver Archives at 604.736.8561 or by visiting the Friends' page on the Archives' website: vancouver.ca/archives

Completed forms should be sent, along with payment to:

Friends of the Vancouver City Archives
c/o City of Vancouver Archives
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, BC Canada V6J 3J9

SPECIAL EVENTS

In November, the Friends will host a special event, the annual fundraiser, called Treasures of the Archives II. Directors will present a select group of paintings and photographic art from the Archives' collection, and will engage in discussion with you throughout the afternoon. More information will be provided in the October Newsletter.

B.C. GAMING COMMISSION GRANT

In August 2006, the Friends of the Vancouver City Archives received a grant of $10,000 from the British Columbia Gaming Commission Direct Access Program for the Ongoing Vancouver Historic Photographs Program. The Friends provided a grant of $3,562.98 for the description project. Pat Hanna was hired in September 2006 to describe photographs in the Major Matthews Photograph collection. It is anticipated that approximately 3,969 photographs will be described by June 2007.

Treasures of the Archives event, October 2006

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends of the Vancouver City Archives,

I am very pleased to tell you that Lisa Smedman of the *Vancouver Courier* will be the guest speaker at our Annual General Meeting on March 25.

A complete Vancouverite, Lisa was born here, works here and is now involved in tracing Vancouver's history in a 12-part series in the *Courier*.

2008 will be a momentous year: The *Courier* will celebrate its 100th anniversary and the Vancouver Archives its 75th anniversary.

If you are interested in working on the Jubilee Committee or joining the Board of Directors please contact me, Wallace Gilby Craig, at 604.980.1865; or e-mail me at: wallace-gilby-craig@shaw.ca

WHO WE ARE

The Friends of the Vancouver City Archives was founded in 1993 to promote public awareness of the City of Vancouver Archives and its services and projects. Through its fundraising activities and special events, it strives to support the use of the Archives' holdings by the general public and the professions. The Friends welcome new members and supporters. If you would like to help preserve Vancouver's documentary heritage, please join the Friends today.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2006-2007

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